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RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 3965
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 2491
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 004785

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DEMARCHES ELECTION COMMISSIONER

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. On November 6, Pakistan's Election Commissioner assured Ambassador that he continued to prepare for parliamentary elections. Legally, only the President has the authority to determine the elections date, and the Commissioner believed the elections would take place in January, more or less on schedule. Following the meeting, Ambassador gave an interview in front of the Commission to CBS and Pakistan state television emphasizing our support for free and fair elections, as planned. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador paid a call November 6 on the Election Commissioner of Pakistan (ECP) Justice (ret) Qazi Muhammad Farooq to urge that parliamentary elections be held, as scheduled, in January. She noted that President Musharraf in his national address November 3 and his meeting with diplomats November 5 had declined to announce a date certain for elections. The Prime Minister had suggested that elections might be postponed for up to a year.

¶3. (C) The Commissioner assured Ambassador that he had received no instructions to delay the elections and he expected they would be held as planned. "The solution to the present political situation lies in having free and fair elections," he said. We are in a "blind alley" and this is the only way out.

¶4. (C) Farooq said that the ECP has completed its elections plans. The voter list of 80 million names was now complete, and they were accepting tenders for a project to place the names on the ECP website within the next 30 days. CDs of the voter lists were being prepared to distribute to the political parties. Instructions to election officials were being circulated, and plans to deliver the 430,000 transparent ballot boxes provided by the U.S. and Japan were being completed. He thanked the U.S. for its continuing support to help the Commission oversee free and fair elections.

¶5. (C) The ECP had prepared a draft code of conduct that it circulated to political parties and NGO's. To date, the ECP had received only a few responses, none from the major parties and none of which contained constructive criticism. The Commissioner said he had extended the date for responses and may do so again. The ECP planned to hold a meeting to discuss the draft code and then finalize it based on comments.

¶6. (C) Ambassador said we understood there may be

difficulties in coordinating national and provincial elections. Farooq said Pakistan planned to hold national and provincial elections on the same day, but they needed to synchronize them. According to the law, elections must be held 60 days after an assembly is dissolved, unless it is dissolved before its term ends when elections must be held within 90 days. The National Assembly is expected to dissolve when its term ends on November 15. The Punjab Assembly will dissolve on November 24, the Sindh Province on December 12, and the Balochistan Assembly on November 28. The Northwest Frontier Province's Assembly was dissolved early on October 10, and the 90 day rule applies there. So, the government needs to coordinate a time to hold elections that will comply with the law for all the assemblies, and this could result in a small delay (a week perhaps) from the proposed January 15 date.

¶ 17. (C) Asked about whether the security situation would impede voting, Farooq said the ECP believes there are only a few districts where they will not be able to hold elections, and he will propose that elections be postponed for 60-90 days (as outlined in the law) for these areas. He identified North and South Waziristan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas plus Tank in the settled areas as requiring postponed elections. He thought that an adequate deployment of paramilitary security forces in Swat and Malakand would enable the GOP to hold elections there despite security concerns. The majority of Pakistan's population lives in the Punjab and Sindh. Farooq noted, therefore, that the problem areas represent at most 6-7 assembly seats and will not affect the overall outcome of the election.

¶ 18. (C) Comment. As always, Farooq was pleasant and well-intentioned, but he clearly has no latitude to take

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action without specific direction from GOP senior leadership.

PATTERSON